

Daily View

“But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today’” Hebrews 3:13

May 25, 2020



My father often spoke of the amazing castles he saw while marching through Germany in 1944. This one, sitting above more modern housing, is in Heidelberg.

The Silent Generation

Jesus warns us, in Matthew 6, to avoid seeking the limelight. I would encourage you to read 6:1-18 but sets the table in v. 1,

Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

The desire for fame and recognition is a potent drug and many are enraptured by it. But there was a whole generation of men and women who, generally, exemplified these words of Jesus. That generation is called the “Silent Generation” and a majority of them have now been silenced permanently by death. Many in that generation never made it to age 30 because they lost their lives in a war, either WWII, the Korean War or Vietnam.

They were called “the Silent Generation” because they went through life without fanfare, without the need to draw attention to themselves. This is remarkable, compared to what we’ve seen in every generation since. Not all, of course, but often, Boomers to Gen Zers have been drawn to the limelight like a moth to flame.

I fell into that trap early on. I wanted to be “somebody” — a professional baseball player, when I was very young, or a songwriter when I was 20. When those dreams were snuffed out, and reality set in, I still yearned for some recognition. That desire was satisfied to some degree with success in sales. This month, after 35 years, I tossed the plaques I received into the trash.

I didn’t get my yearning for fame from LeRoy or Evangeline (my mom and dad). They could have been poster children for that silent generation. They were reluctant to talk about themselves. My dad told the same old stories over and over and most of them were humorous recollections of life with his five brothers or self-deprecating stories of failures. My mother’s stories were primarily about her five siblings or experiences she had with myself and my brother when we were little. There was no hint of braggadocio in either of them.

I respect the humility and I think I understand why they didn’t engage in self-aggrandizement. As kids, they lived through the Great Depression, something no generation after them can relate to. Let’s not kid ourselves. In the deep recession that began in 2008, the malls were still crowded and the store shelves were still stocked, at least in middle class urban areas like Folsom, Roseville and El Dorado Hills.

In 1941, when Pearl Harbor was attacked, many of the men in this generation were “of age” (18 and up) and were called on to fight a war that was not of their making. They did it out of a sense of duty and honor and love of country. Over 400,000 of them died. This is why Tom Brokaw called them “the Greatest Generation” in his book by the same name.

Most of the men would not talk about the details of their wartime experience, especially if they had seen extensive combat. That was either because they loathed drawing attention to themselves or the experience was so horrific they preferred to keep silent about it.

I have reason to believe that my dad was silent about his service for both of those reasons. When I first found out the about his service in Europe, after his death, I was a bit resentful. There, on his discharge papers, was the notation that he served as a medic and was given three bronze stars within a year’s time. That was news to me. He never mentioned it or even alluded to it. When asked what he did, he always said he was a cook, which was true, but that was only after serving as a medic in combat the year before.

I’ve since come to terms with why he didn’t talk about it and I respect him for it. There are still some people in our time who have that same spirit and I respect them. They serve humbly without fanfare, without craving recognition.

Today is not “Happy Memorial Day,” as one subject line in an email I received today declared. It’s hardly “happy.” Today, we honor and remember those who were silenced, not by choice, but by the ugly reality of war.